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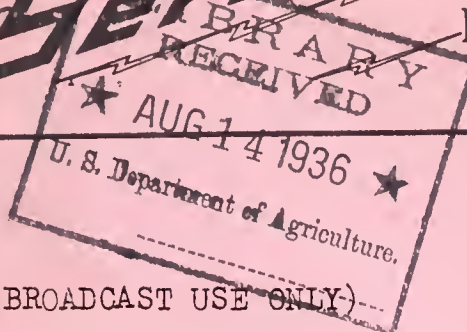






HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)



533579  
Wednesday, July 1, 1936

Subject: "IF YOU HAD FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

"If you had five hundred dollars to spend fixing up your home, what repairs or replacements would come first?" This was one of the questions asked in connection with the nationwide housing survey made in 1934 by the Bureau of Home Economics, the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, and the various State colleges that cooperated. The survey included 622,000 farm homes all over the country. Literally thousands of these were in great need of repairs, and the owners of many others wanted added space and labor-saving conveniences.

About 146,000 of these owners said that if they had as much as five hundred dollars to spend they would first improve their walls, ceilings, and floors. Another 128,000 would fix roofs first, while 118,000 would attend to doors, windows, and screens ahead of anything else. Painting and many other needed improvements were mentioned. Altogether, 194,000 reported the bad condition of the interior finish of their homes.

Of course "Ol' Man Depression" is the chief reason for this sad state of affairs. The picture has changed a little for the better in some cases since the survey was made. Increased funds may be available because of better income or federal loans. If a family can't spend five hundred dollars, perhaps it can have two hundred and fifty or even a hundred dollars to use.

Sometimes it is a serious question whether the house is sound enough to warrant spending any time or money on it. But even if it is not sound, the house may have precious associations and from that standpoint the family may wish to strengthen it structurally and improve it inside as much as possible. Suppose everyone agrees that the framework is strong and the arrangement of the rooms is satisfactory. Perhaps the whole family can cooperate on the interior renovation to save money.

Can's you imagine something very similar to an old-fashioned fall cleaning taking place when the family has once decided to make five hundred dollars go as far as possible toward a freshened home? A good way to work in a busy modern household that must live in the house while it is undergoing its renovation is to take one room at a time and strip it of all furnishing. Take **everything** out, so you can see all parts of the walls, ceiling, floor, and completely inspect the wood trim, the doors and windows, sills, lighting fixtures, mantelpiece and fireplace if there is one, and any other structural features.



If the walls have damp places or spots that indicate that the roof or flashings have leaked, the original cause of the damage must be dealt with before anything is done to the wall, or the new work will be wasted.

Are there cracks in the walls or ceiling? They may be due to the house settling or insecure foundations. Before they can be remedied the men of the house should take a look at its underpinnings and decide whether extra beams or supports are necessary. Foundations should extend below frost line. If the outside masonry is damp it may need furring and insulation.

The cracks can be pointed up by widening them slightly to make a wedge shape inside. Then when a mixture of plaster of paris and lime is pressed into them it will hold. After the filled places have been smoothed, they are sand-papered before papering or painting the surface. Both painting and papering are often undertaken by the women folk in a busy farm family. Home demonstration reports from many States where women have worked on the interior finish of the house indicate that such work is by no means beyond the strength of an active woman who isn't afraid to get up on a step-ladder.

Still, there are a lot of houses at present with walls and ceilings so bad that it may be desirable to cover them entirely with a new surface. Repairing or replacing a large amount of plaster causes dirt and disorder. Plaster dust seems to fly all over a house. There are a number of new kinds of plain and ornamental wall coverings on the market, which can be nailed right in place over the old surface, with few tools and little experience. Boards of special composition, ply wood, or metal sheets may be used. Each has certain advantages in use and price. However, some of these materials are too heavy for a woman to handle.

Where protection from heat, cold, or noise is a consideration, insulation board is good, especially on ceilings or the upper parts of walls where it is not subject to mechanical injury. A wainscot of vertical or horizontal boards may be used on the lower part of the wall.

When applying these materials over old plastered surfaces, all loose or badly broken plaster should be removed. It is best to apply the sheets over 1 by 2 inch wood strips spaced to fit the material, but not more than 16 inches apart. These strips can be securely nailed to the joists through the plaster, and should be shimmed to provide a level base for the new surface. Most of these materials will shrink and expand a little, so manufacturers' instructions about making joints should be followed.

Sometimes in an old house that has settled the ceiling or floor is not level. On the ceiling one of these composition board finishes can be put on so as to correct the deviation. Metal lath will reinforce corners effectively.

Our time is up, and we've barely scratched the surface of a single room. The floor is the next point of attack. So floors, the framework of doors and windows and other structural features of the room will be taken up in later talks on improving the inside of a house.

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